

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 10508 291619Z

70

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AEC-05 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 CIEP-01

COME-00 DODE-00 EB-07 FPC-01 H-01 INR-05 INT-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-03 RSC-01 SAM-01 OES-03

SP-02 SS-15 STR-01 TRSE-00 FRB-01 PA-01 USIA-06

PRS-01 FEA-01 /086 W

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R 291538Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5910

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: ENRG CO

SUBJ: FUEL SHORTAGES IN COLOMBIA

REF: BOGOTA 10406

1. MOST AREAS OF COLOMBIA HAVE BEEN HIT BY SHORTAGE OF MOTOR GASOLINE AND LPG DURING PAST SEVERAL DAYS. MOST SERVICE STATIONS IN BOGOTA ARE CLOSED, TRAFFIC SHARPLY REDUCED, AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES SEVERELY CURTAILED. WHILE SHORTAGE APPEARS TO BE RESULT OF COINCIDENCE AT TIME WHEN OVERALL PETROLEUM SITUATION RECEIVING SUBSTANTIAL PUBLICITY, PUBLIC REACTION HAS BEEN ONE OF GREATER-THAN-USUAL DISTRESS. CONFIDENCE IN ECONOMY APPEARED TO BE RETURNING TO NORMAL FOLLOWING ADVERSE REACTION TO ECONOMIC EMERGENCY; GAS SHORTAGE, HOWEVER, COMBINED WITH PRICE INCREASES AND STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS MAY HAVE RESULTED IN REAWAKENING OF SLIGHT PESSIMISM AND MALAISE OVER ECONOMIC PROSPECTS OF COUNTRY.

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2. SHORTAGES OF MOTOR GASOLINE AND LPG ARE RESULT OF BROKEN

PIPELINES AND SHUTDOWN FOR MAINTENANCE OF BARRANCABERMEJA REFINERY. BROKEN PIPELINE CONDUCTING CRUDE TO REFINERY PLUS GENERALLY REDUCED LEVELS OF PRODUCTION WERE ALSO FACTOR IN REDUCED REFINERY OUTPUT. ON RESUMPTION OF REFINERY OPERATION GASOLINE PIPELINE TO BOGOTA, WHICH ALSO SUPPLIES MOST OF REST OF COUNTRY, WAS BROKEN. THIS DAMAGE NOW REPAIRED BUT DEPLETED STOCKS WERE NOT SUFFICIENT DURING INTERIM PERIOD.

3. WHILE PERIODIC SHORTAGES OF GASOLINE AND LPG ARE NOT UNUSUAL IN COLOMBIA, PRESENT SHORTAGE CAME AT TIME WHEN ENTIRE ISSUE OF PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY BEING GIVEN HEAVY ATTENTION. IN ADDITION TO PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF PETROLEUM SITUATION NOTED REFTTEL, SERVICE STATIONS HAD CURTAILED OPERATIONS, GASOLINE TRANSPORTERS HAD BEEN ON STRIKE, STUDENTS WERE DEMONSTRATING OVER BUS FARE INCREASES, GASOLINE IMPORTS HAD BEEN MADE PUBLIC, AND INCREASES IN ELECTRICITY TARIFFS WERE PROPOSED. NORMAL FRUSTRATION OVER CUTBACK IN TRANSPORT AND SHORTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD FUEL APPEARS TO BE TRANSLATED INTO MORE PESSIMISM REGARDING OVERALL FUNCTIONING OF ECONOMY. NUMEROUS BUSINESSMEN HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER FUTURE SUPPLY AND COST OF ENERGY AND TRANSPORT.

4. EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE PRESENT SITUATION PORTENDS GRAVE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES FOR COLOMBIA. PERIODIC FUEL SHORTAGES ARE LIKELY TO BE MORE OFTEN IN FUTURE, BUT PRESENT DIFFICULTY WILL PROBABLY BE RESOLVED BY END OF WEEK. WE DO SUSPECT, HOWEVER, THAT SITUATION MAY RESULT IN FURTHER SLIGHT EROSION OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION AND COULD FORCE AN EARLY MOVE TO ADJUST PETROLEUM PRICE STRUCTURES.

WHITE

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